

Legends, plots and alternative realities: narratives about contemporary reality and regimes of knowledge¹

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ABSTRACT

The article seeks to analyze the constitution of new "regimes of truth", observing a series of phenomena that result, in large part, from processes linked to modernization, considering, also, the changes that make up our contemporaneity. We seek to understand how regimes of truth are established, based on the hypothesis that they are systems of beliefs that, consolidated in time, suffer constant mutation processes. Methodology: Bibliographical study. Narratives are linked to the ways of interpreting reality, allowing the recognition of identities; they are a set of cognitive procedures which generate individual and shared knowledge, making such knowledge objective, real and credible.

KEYWORDS: Regimes of truth. Knowledge. Contemporary reality.

Lendas, complôs e realidades alternativas: as narrativas acerca da realidade contemporânea e os regimes de conhecimento

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a constituição de novos regimes de verdade, observando uma série de fenômenos que decorrem, em grande parte, de processos ligados à modernização e as mudanças que compõem nossa contemporaneidade. Busca-se entender como os regimes de verdade se estabelecem a partir da hipótese de que se trata de sistemas de crenças que, consolidados no tempo, sofrem processos de

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mutação constantes. Adota-se como metodologia principal o estudo bibliográfico. Conclui-se que as narrativas são ligadas às formas de interpretar a realidade, permitindo o reconhecimento das identidades; são também um conjunto de procedimentos cognitivos que geram os conhecimentos individuais e compartilhados, tornando tal conhecimento objetivo, real e crível.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Regimes de verdade. Conhecimento. Realidade contemporânea.

Leyendas, tramas y realidades alternativas: narrativas sobre la realidad contemporánea y regímenes de conocimiento

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la constitución de nuevos regímenes de verdad, observando una serie de fenómenos que resultan, en gran parte, de procesos ligados a la modernización y a los cambios que conforman nuestra contemporaneidad. Busca comprender cómo se establecen los regímenes de verdad a partir de la hipótesis de que se trata de sistemas de creencias que, consolidados en el tiempo, sufren constantes procesos de mutación. La principal metodología adoptada es un estudio bibliográfico. Concluimos que las narrativas están vinculadas a las formas de interpretar la realidad, permitiendo el reconocimiento de las identidades; también son un conjunto de procedimientos cognitivos que generan conocimiento individual y compartido, haciendo que dicho conocimiento sea objetivo, real y creíble.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Regímenes de verdad. Conocimientos. La realidad contemporánea.

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Introduction

Once upon a time there was truth. The truth of the facts, of the purposes, objective, demonstrated, proven. It was a time when there were some certainties, data were pertinent, events were real and a hypothesis

could be discussed, amidst semantic disagreements, in a dialectically democratic way. Institutional authorities were given the authority to declare the way to believe the facts. It was a time when appealing to facts was imperative and scientific discussion an obligation, while the reason for skills was considered a necessary link to civic and professional behaviour. At that time, parents encouraged their children to follow the path of studies, to earn a diploma, to specialise, to follow a career.

It was a regime of knowledge thus constituted. These "dogmas" were believed.

The regimes of knowledge, however, usually change over time, shifting their guidelines. Thus it was when the ancient world came to accept the truth regime of the Christian world. So it was when secularization displaced religious truth, replacing it with its own regime of truth. In the same way, today we find ourselves in a social, economic, cultural and political environment dominated by cognitive polarisation, by personal and biographical persuasions and, above all, by a "fantastic" dimension that calls into question any pretence to resort to "facts".

We currently find ourselves in a strange world, in which we reside in imaginary communities that only exist dematerialised and online, in which even wealth, money, is "crypto", it is immaterial. Meanwhile, politicians without clear competences win national and international elections through empathy no longer with citizens but with publics who, in turn, through their subjective content that feeds the online world, unveil to institutions and companies their "techno-sub-consciousness", their real or fictional secrets.

We live, then, in a new regime that has its truths, which provoke consequences in the rules of social relations, in the models of credibility and of individual and institutional and collective identities, less and less based on facts and more and more on emotions.

We can observe two evident results in this situation. The first, that the predominance of the fantastic and fiction allows the coexistence

of all kinds of "alternative" reality and facts: situations, information, events, experiences that, even without existing, become more real than reality, through a true aversion to rationality as it had been established between the eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth. The second, that to live in the midst of legends and beliefs in which personal knowledge is antagonistic to institutional knowledge, it is necessary to develop tools that allow the understanding of social representations in which we find ourselves, transforming such understanding into sustainable and healthy narratives for our existence.

In this context, is it then possible to choose which truths to frequent and which regimes of truth to build, without submitting to the existing through fear or violence? In the "economy of fantasy" and in the world of post-truth, what we observe is that the treasure to be conquered is us and, in this sense, it becomes necessary to understand how to manage this new regime of truth in which we find ourselves, to become protagonists - and not passive subjects - of fictions that put at risk reason, reputation, institutions.

In this article, we seek to understand how the new regimes of truth are constituted, through the observation of some phenomena linked, mainly, to the processes and changes brought about by contemporaneity. We will try to understand how such regimes are established, considering that they are belief systems which, consolidated in time, suffer processes that make them something new. Narratives are places where we reside, recognizing our identity and that of others, a set of cognitive procedures that generate knowledge of individuals and communities, locking this knowledge in dimensions of objectivity, reality, credibility. According to Tarde (2012), such cognitive procedures are nothing more than the generation of personal and collective beliefs and myths that guide our lives, providing meaning, desire and behaviours. It is about this complex issue that the present text seeks to discuss.

Authority and knowledge: the construction of the Modern truth regime

The idea of knowledge brings us directly back to the function of the library throughout history. When we think of the library, it is inevitable to refer to a place where knowledge is ordered, classified and preserved in materials of various kinds, from books to periodicals to audiovisuals, both in their analogue and digital versions. It is, however, an environment where hierarchy exists not only when considering the aspect of classification, but also in the librarian/user relationship. In the traditional library, for example, the reference service, the interface between the library itself and the user, one observes the hierarchy in which the librarian has more knowledge than the user to satisfy the needs of the latter. The catalogue, the indexes and all the other elements that provide the necessary tools to reach the information sought highlight the character of the "search for truth" of which the library itself, in theory, guarantees.

But let us see how these ideas, somewhat simplified here, can become clearer. In a library, theoretically, we find the published elements that represent the qualification of the various points of view on knowledge. Not only do we recognise the authority of knowledge in individuals, but also in books, institutions and instruments. Of course, for many "naïve" people, any publication can have authority, but there is a hierarchy, which means that the scientific community and the social institution of science have, during the last centuries, acquired a role through their products that have come to be considered reliable, in terms of information, precisely because "certified" by the community's own production and control systems. Of course, the question of what this includes or excludes can be controversial, just as it is clear that what one needs to know also depends on what others expect to know in order to meet the demands of work or social obligations. It is a complex interaction, involving the factors of

others' wants, needs and expectations, which, together with learning opportunities and abilities, will have effects on how we think about the world. Libraries are 'warehouses' of knowledge products, although this does not mean that they contain the collection of everything that contributes to their development.

Although most of the specialized production does not reach a wide audience, there is a cultural and knowledge industry dedicated to the production of textbooks, scientific popularization and leisure, aimed at a wide range of readers and that can be found in most public libraries. Even in these, however, we look for clues that guarantee the quality of the information, clues that we identify, for example, in the guarantees offered by certain publishers, in publications presented by professional or institutional organisations, by official agencies or state publishers, or in awards received. All this, theoretically, would guarantee the quality of the information supply, although the discussion involves the processes capable of transforming news and evidence into information bases (VASSALLO, 2011). In short, the reliability of the library is based on the idea that it is possible to find sources, even if they disagree with each other, but that the institution considers to have gone through recognized processes of elaboration in the fields in which they were produced, and gives them a bibliographic designation.

Certainly, this does not mean that the library is the repository of absolute truths: it is a place where, over time, the possibility of finding "reliable" information has been built up, within systems endowed with socially shared bases for forming structured opinions and, from these, making choices that lead to knowledge. The guarantees are of an ideal kind and not all libraries reflect them at all times. However, there is no doubt that at the basis of their existence lies the idea of the possibility of access to materials selected and organised in such a way as to stimulate the transformation of unstable opinions into informative choices that generate knowledge.

Modern libraries, through collection development, have allowed users to ask themselves, when faced with a single source, about the need to obtain more information on certain subjects. The role of libraries seems to have been to offer different alternatives on various subjects, allowing further investigation and search for alternatives to information acquisition issues.

Finding the best collections for information needs can be a complex path, and the structure of libraries requires professionals in charge of these operations who can be trusted, in whom one can recognize some kind of authority and credibility: the librarians (GORMAN, 2004). It is worth reflecting here on some aspects of the role of librarians in order to understand to what extent their authority, and therefore that of libraries themselves, is constructed.

In addition to being responsible for the custody and retrieval of information, librarians were charged with an additional service: one of their functions is to carry out work on the materials present in order to provide users with an overall picture of the state of knowledge through activities that make up what we call a bibliography. A brief digression is necessary to understand the reasons why, over time, the library became a place where information could offer guarantees for the bases of discussions and not just the result of individual opinions. To understand the issue, let us consider the problem that librarians are not necessarily experts in the fields in which they organize materials, so they lack, in a sense, the ability to exercise effective quality control over them, beyond their professional capacity to collect, describe and make them accessible (MELOT, 2004).

Faced with the set of non-specialist users, who may be satisfied with using a library in which the materials are organized and made available in a coherent way, the interference of the librarian is recognized, but without the problem of attributing quality to the sources. If these users are looking for information to occupy their spare time, for recreational purposes, it

seems that the library can safely be replaced by access to the net, claiming that its function is exhausted when this kind of information is found, in a multiplied and diversified form, in the digital world.

The question, however, seems to us a little more complex. We have said that a librarian cannot fully evaluate the content of the materials he or she handles. Logically, therefore, he could not offer users the distinction between correct and incorrect information. The librarian, however, operates within a much broader system, which assigns a cognitive value to a set of sources, which may be produced by critics and compilers of reference lists, consisting of dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, periodicals... What has been established over time is the principle that what librarians recognize as standard reference works takes on an authoritative value for knowledge and can be considered reliable for information needs (WILSON, 1983).

In the same way, it can be said that although the library is not a place of absolute truth, professionals work there who, within a broader system of knowledge production, have established methodologies that allow the selection and provision of information considered reliable because they are so because of the processes established in the various areas that produced them. It may seem irrelevant to reiterate these aspects that characterize the constitution of libraries in modernity, but we consider them quite current at a time when they are going through a phase of discredit, because they are in a false competition with the multiple and apparently much broader offers of the global network.

In this apparently "rich" global network, it seems to us, there is a rather dangerous trap: the question of the selection and reliability of sources is open and still without satisfactory solutions. Let us think, in fact, how the logic of Information Science works when it is dedicated to the problems of communication from the point of view of efficiency, but indifferent to the quality of the messages, dealing, therefore, with the most purely informative and non-informative perspective. The major concern of computerized

information systems has focused on the speed and reliability of signals, but not on the selection and quality of what these signals carry. The important thing in this field has been to develop systems in which what was transmitted corresponds to what was received (i.e. the basis of information is Shannon's mathematical theory (1948), but any information transmitted, in this logic, has the same value as information, regardless of its sender. The dominant concern, in this perspective, is that the information received is the necessary information, and not that it corresponds to the result produced within certain fields of knowledge.

Similarly, the informational competence aspect of the user, who may or may not have the ability to search for appropriate information, is not considered, in this informational perspective. To solve this kind of problem, one has to turn to specialists with the skills of librarians, bibliographers and cataloguers. Librarians do not need to directly assess the quality of documents in a library, but they can offer information paths based on materials selected on the authority that is attributed to the fields in which these materials are produced (MELOT, 2004). Therefore, libraries provide acceptable sources of information because they are based on their production in socially recognised fields. Libraries, in turn, have developed their own community reference standards and professional methodologies that have made them reliable in organising and making materials available. Librarians, in this sense, represent a professional class whose skills lie in finding sources produced in a way that allows them to recognise professional authority over knowledge.

The library, until the advent of the web, was a place structured on the basis of knowledge needs that reflect clearly positivist ideas of science and knowledge that are proposed, ideally, as certified by the very order that the library has and that it reflects in its organizational and research tools. Regardless of the fact that the library may be 'universalist' and unspecialised, the division it proposes is linked to disciplinary divisions that

identify, even today, that Baconian tripartition of the mind that divides its products between reason, memory and imagination.

With the advent of the World Wide Web, however, this hierarchical relationship tends to dissolve, since what is validated and classified by the library institution, to which Latour (2004) attributes a fundamental role in the knowledge production network, is equated to ephemeral information which, through search engines, is found to have the same weight as the 'certified' information. All information thus acquires value within an individual search context in which the available filters are often unfamiliar to users. The distinction between true and false loses its boundaries, represented, in history, by the library itself and its internal divisions (RADFORD, 1998). In the spaces of the global network, the authority principle and the division of fields of knowledge transcend the boundaries of disciplinary fields and knowledge becomes, to use Bauman's (2002) metaphor, 'liquid'.

An interesting example in this respect is Wikipedia, the great online "encyclopedia" compiled by volunteers, whose use is often considered controversial, but which objectively represents today one of the fastest and most effective sources of consultation for online users in search of answers and daily information.

We would like to recall here a short story by Borges (2003), *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. In this story, which belongs to the fantasy genre, we find the author in a conversation with his friend Bioy Casares, hearing about Uqbar, an unknown place to which Bioy refers. Borges asks where he had read about it, and Bioy replies that he had found the reference to Uqbar in *The Anglo American Cyclopaedia*. As Borges has a copy of the encyclopaedia at home, he consults it, but cannot find the entry. Borges thinks that Bioy has attributed one of his own inventions to other sources, but, out of modesty, he does not want to take credit for it, and we can only share with Borges our doubts about Uqbar's existence. Bioy returns home and, in his edition of the encyclopaedia, finds the Uqbar entry, which he later shows to Borges. It is a

fantasy story, whose literary nature is beyond doubt. Uqbar exists only in fantasy, and the encyclopedia cited is also a product of fantasy, modelled on the much more real Encyclopedia Britannica, which in a library would be catalogued in the class of reference works.

A century later, when we are looking for generic information, we often find ourselves using Wikipedia: as Lucia Sardo (2016, p. 435) tells us,

Wikipedia has become the solution for improvising information needs [...], for the need for quick information about something, for getting an idea about an unknown or almost unknown topic, for finding more information without necessarily having to go through other forms of research. A solid and reliable starting point. This is what we would like it to be.

Storytelling: narrative and interests

Faced with the tide of information, we try to keep control over the world by telling stories: we try to maintain its coherence through narrations, intrinsic simplifications, because no single story can account for everything that happens: the world is too complex to be contained in tales. But instead of accepting this fact, we make our stories more complex, labyrinthine and without a closed conclusion. In this way, paranoia, in an age of information overload, produces a feedback effect: the lack of understanding of such a complex world brings about the need for ever-increasing amounts of information which, in turn, confuse our understanding, revealing unexpected complexities, which we will have to account for with even more complex theories about the world: a larger amount of information does not necessarily produce greater ineligibility. On the contrary, it may have the effect of creating greater chaos.

One of the current ways of doing this is called *Storytelling*. It is not simply the English translation that defines the act of storytelling. The use of

this term defines a methodology and a discipline that, through narrative rhetorical principles, generates narratives capable of influencing different audiences who can identify with them. Storytelling is now widely used by business, politics and economics to effectively promote values, ideas, initiatives, products and consumption, through a disciplinary approach that focuses on the dynamics of social influence which, in turn, is applied to the needs of business, consumption and institutions.

These are stories whose purpose is to convince us of ideas and modes of consumption, related to the sphere of propaganda communication. The use of the English term is due to the fact that its characteristics do not reside simply in telling a story, but in designing it to be more effective. The use of specific storytelling techniques is seen, in business, as producing strategic advantages in market competition, not only in terms of communication, but - this is what interests us - also in terms of culture. In this sense, the narratives built through storytelling allow companies to reach dominant positions in the universe of symbols and discourses capable of stimulating consumerist impulses.

The narrative is thus used to give meaning to everyday actions, so that communication involves emotional aspects, aiming to create collective and individual identities that allow people to recognize themselves in life and work. The narratives constructed by storytelling, thanks to the use of rhetoric that seeks the emotional dimension, lend themselves to the constitution of collective and individual memories capable of guaranteeing the continuity of chosen knowledge and the orientation of behaviour, as in the case of public opinion. Through them there is the development of a culture of values and attitudes that are reflected in everyday life, through narratives capable of communicating activities and ideas effectively and facilitating the exposure of problems in order to find solutions. Essentially, storytelling communicates consumer and/or political "visions".

Narratives of this nature are diligent in creating characters capable of captivating the audience, using stories that are pleasant to listen to, that can generate imaginative spaces. In this sense, storytelling is more effective when transposed from information technology to multi-/trans-media platforms.

The act of telling a story through storytelling has acquired, therefore, new nuances and meanings, in particular transmedia narration, which has become the art of narrating in digital platforms, based on the assumption of its interactivity and sharing (CODELUPPI, 2012). In a cultural context of media convergence, which we find ourselves, the art of storytelling, having as support different media, can be considered as the main entertainment strategy adopted by large conglomerates.

The expansion of the narrative in different platforms is a stimulus for the creation of synergies between products, thanks to the horizontal integration of entertainment areas and the search for the development of content franchises (brands). In this context, transmedia storytelling differs from traditional narrative models by being able to create expanded narrative universes and because of its high degree of narrative complexity.

Henry Jenkins (2007) created the term transmedia storytelling, a tool created for the development and reconfiguration of entertainment in multiplatforms, which becomes omnipresent in the network society and stimulates the sharing of information, from a model of participatory culture, i.e., capable of giving visibility to the dialogue between producers and consumers/fans.

To understand what is happening beyond the use of storytelling as a form of entertainment, it is necessary to attempt a reflection on the narratives from this comparative multimedia perspective, since the narrative used in digital platforms exceeds the boundaries of fantasy, to take over everyday life.

Today, narratives are, in fact, spread throughout the global media, with an unparalleled strength. Storytelling is a powerful channel for accessing information, which can be transferred from a set of data to a narrative plan. It is, therefore, a way of organising information, a method of approaching emotions and a means of building community.

A narrative developed as storytelling is a story that has a beginning, a development and a conclusion, characters, a sequence of events and a progression of things in motion, while the information is composed of points, the data: the narrative 'connects' the data, and is effective when it is composed of a narrative sequence in which the order of a story may not reflect the chronological development of facts, or the contingency of cause and effect relationships. It should highlight seemingly insignificant details and be perceived as non-random, with a coherent plot between the various parts and the whole. A characteristic of narrative is its coherence, which makes it believable, while the centre of the narrative act is the experience of the storyteller, the one who transforms this experience into a narrative.

To identify the elements of storytelling, we can adopt as reference Stefano Calabrese (2010), just pointing out that all storytelling narratives are organized around the desire of an actor to follow and promote a goal, despite the existing obstacles and thanks to the planning to remove these obstacles. As the author shows, already from the age of three we are able to elaborate styles of narration that allow us to classify the mental representations in which we find ourselves and compensate for the lack of information, thanks to a specific form of memory, called semantics, in which we interpret events. The ability to foresee the future, as history or destiny, belongs only to human beings, insofar as the ability to narrate constitutes a cognitive tool that can provide models for the conceptual understanding of situations and cooperate in the spatio-temporal configuration of everyday actions.

Thus, narrative practices compensate the gap between theoretical knowledge and empirical conditions, while concepts, data, which in

themselves are delocalized, acquire their own environment and space thanks to narrative. Narrating something, therefore, does not only mean connecting specific events to a reference scheme, but above all it means inserting them in a sequence of processes that allow, among other things, predicting future events.

Considering these aspects, it seems to us, that narrative acts constitute a large part of everyday activities - as producers or consumers - and that the way individuals resort to their predictive imagination, establishing their expectation horizons and making decisions (in the English term currently used, Problem Solving) depends on these acts. Our degree of innovation in storytelling depends, to a great extent, on the way we submit ourselves every day to more or less stable combinations of semantic and sequential memories, transmitted by the plots of films, books and advertising storyboards.

Before going further, we would like to point out that when we highlight the convergent culture as an element that eliminates the hierarchies of knowledge and the elaboration of new paths of knowledge based on storytelling, we are not endorsing a perspective of "cultural populism" that uncritically accepts aesthetic manifestations of popular origin in their entirety: it is about taking note of phenomena that cross the various fields of academic study, establishing between them a dialectic that can offer a better understanding of certain cultural phenomena (FABRIS, 2012).

The idea of knowledge, as we have seen, is marked by the process of construction of the authority of groups and institutions, becoming one of the elements capable of articulating the very idea of progress. The communication model observed in this positive culture horizon is not different from the one outlined in traditional libraries, and can be schematized in a linear and unidirectional sequence that goes from the sender, through the medium, to the receiver (HOOPER-GREENHILL, 2000; SOLIMINE & ZANCHINI, 2020). In such a device, the receiver is only considered at the moment when the "overflow" of information occurs.

The selection and control of meanings are the exclusive task of the sender, while the medium is the core of communication. In this sense, the term "dissemination" represents well the communicative act in which the public is a passive receiver.

It is a model that offers a "moral imperative": the function of knowledge and the places deputed to it is to educate, while the processes developed for this purpose aim to "administer" the information to be assimilated. The principle of authority belongs to the sender, who seems to be endowed with the legitimate knowledge to be distributed to the public, which, in turn, is not yet seen from the perspective of culture as a "concrete system of signification" (WILLIAMS, 2000), i.e. with the focus on those aspects of social life that contribute to the construction of meanings.

Modern conceptions of knowledge and of the actors who produce it and allow access to it were therefore positive, and set out to represent ideals of encyclopaedic and universal knowledge, visible in the very separation of spaces, where scholars were opposed to the general public.

At this point, we can consider the change brought about by digital technologies which, as we have already pointed out, make it possible to gather and organize information data outside traditional disciplinary frameworks, and which allow the development of knowledge without clear boundaries between the real and the fantastic.

An example can be seen by observing television channels that ostensibly offer scientific popularization and, in reality, tend to offer fiction without any relation, even if distant, with the genre we call documentary. This is the case of high circulation products such as those of TV channels *Discovery Channel* and *National Geographic*, which present themselves as spaces of scientific popularization and intelligent entertainment, but in whose programming we find programs dedicated to the discovery of fictional beings, such as mermaids or dragons that, by the homogeneous presentation with the documentaries themselves (same language, characters who present

themselves as scientific researchers, forms of narration), from mythological creatures generate impossible scientific "facts"³.

'Smart' entertainment is a very productive field, in terms of product that transfers and takes place in material places that can be visited. Two examples can illustrate how it works. The first is inspired by the well-known television series CSI, an American crime series broadcast by the *Columbia Broadcasting System* (CBS), which offers a path that allows you to live the adventure of a crime in search of its solution. On a specific website you can find the information to make a real visit to the exhibition site, but a virtual experience is also possible. The interesting point is the reference to the fact that it is a product that presents itself as an educational adventure on the web: in fact, it is a game designed by a university. In this sense, the "cultural" aspect of the activity is stimulated, once again breaking the boundary between real and fantasy, between science and game. Culture, leisure and entertainment are now inseparable, and the access to the web tends to make everything converge in this direction, producing a relationship in which there is no longer a separation between science and fantasy.

The path of regimes of truth passes through the modes offered by convergent culture - which does not exclude, but produces new materialities - in the logic of knowledge, now undeniable, no longer seen exclusively as the responsibility of the public sphere, of the State, of the school which, in an Enlightenment perspective, proposed it as the foundation of progress and as a means of educating citizens.

In some aspects of the convergent culture that digital technology brings into play, the development of cultural processes that, through storytelling, break traditional frontiers and hierarchies of knowledge, as a form of narrative based on the interests and planning and marketing

³ See https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sirene_-_Il_mistero_svelato /. The Discovery Channel product is defined "documentary" and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFx79kRi9Ag&t=233s>, documentary on dragons produced by the National Geographic.

resources of companies capable of drawing up sales strategies on a global basis, stands out.

In this way, we point out the loss of orientation in the appropriation of knowledge that the global network produces, especially when information is sought without further filters, as it was done in a library. However, it is not possible to be defenders of pre-existing hierarchies, as these are no longer able to reflect the current needs of knowledge construction. If the narratives of modernity are now unconvincing, however, we note with concern that what replaces them in the narrative of culture and its products is essentially linked to the needs of the market, with the contradictions that this implies when we think about the need for permanence of memory and the need for constant renewal of the goods that the market itself requires in order to exist.

We would like to emphasize that we are showing how convergent culture is an element that eliminates knowledge hierarchies and the elaboration of new paths of knowledge based on storytelling. We are not endorsing a perspective of 'cultural populism' that uncritically accepts aesthetic manifestations of popular origin: it is a matter of taking note of the phenomena that cross the various fields of academic study, so that, even today, we speak of culture in a 'high' sense in certain disciplinary areas and of communication in others, without establishing between them a dialectic that can offer a better understanding of cultural phenomena. The culture we produce today needs to be thought and managed in a new way, considering it from a perspective distinct from that which separates high culture from everyday culture, as is still often seen from the perspective of social theories on the subject.

Before it was science, its method and information

The scientific method, the hallmark of modernity, in principle allows anyone to repeat a path of knowledge that goes from question to answer. The reproduction of experiences leads to the confirmation, modification,

improvement, as well as the refutation of the results. An interesting way of thinking about science is through the idea of holistic and integral knowledge, in its humanistic beginning: a proposal of "collective intelligence". It is in Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1999), manifesto of the desired, but not yet accomplished, revolution of modern scientific thought, that we find the institutional model of production, conservation and dissemination of knowledge. It is worth saying that this is the tripod that sustains what the West calls science: the teaching places (schools, universities), the books (which require a publishing organization, for their production and libraries for their conservation) and, finally, those who dedicate themselves to teaching or research.

Powers and knowledges which, however, remained on the periphery of the historical model of scientific thought, which for a long time privileged the ideological choice of a beneficial science and of results, in which the production of knowledge in the West is identified with a certain notion of progress (BACON, 1999; ROSSI, 2001). There we have a strongly ethnocentric position, criticised since the First World War, and which, after the end of the Cold War, gradually regained its strength, allying itself, almost a neo-positivism, to the neoliberal policies of market globalisation. The companies of the capitalist system, for example, have extraordinary access to information which, with the help of storage technologies, can be recombined and applied to all purposes and in all contexts, as merchandise. On the other hand, this puts great pressure on labour. The e-economy cannot function without workers who are skilled, both technologically and in terms of content, in this enormous flow of information, organising it and thus transforming it into specific knowledge, appropriate to the aim and purpose of the production process. The "intellectual workforce" that takes care of the infosphere must be highly educated, trained to take initiatives (CASTELLS, 2009). Companies, small or large, depend on the quality and autonomy of the workforce.

Intellectual workers, highly skilled 'labour', must be able to reprogramme their skills and knowledge, and to think according to rapidly changing objectives, often within an evolving business environment. This programming or self-programming capacity requires a certain type of education, and the accumulated knowledge and information heritage must be constantly expanded and modified (CASTELLS, 2009; BERRAREI, 2005). This has extraordinary consequences for the demands placed on the education system, both during the years of training and during maintenance and updating processes.

Learning how to learn becomes a necessity, as well as acquiring the ability to transform the information obtained in the learning process into specific knowledge, are two needs that invest all areas of knowledge. In a system where knowledge has become hyperfragmented by excessive specialization, it is necessary to establish to what extent to learn for the maintenance of a system linked to the logic of information as merchandise and capital, surrendering to a purely technological rationality (MARCUSE, 1999). It is a framework that draws workers as "executors" of orders, efficient and updated, but still, mere executors of neoliberal policies.

On the other hand, the search for a critical scientific path rekindles the debate about the information-related institutions developed on the basis of Bacon's project; the person in charge of the "calculation centre" of a network of academies, researchers and teachers, who was already the librarian (LATOUR, 2000), claims for himself an influential role not only in the discussion on how to organise knowledge, but also on why to classify, for whom and for what, seeking to transfer his focus from a know-how to a know-how-saying (CERTEAU, 1996).

Researching theory means considering some "a priori" that allows justifying the exaltation of the objective as a privileged place, to the detriment of other possible places: it is the so-called scientific method, a straight way, deliberately chosen to obtain a desired result. The method

highlights certain objects in order to treat them under "laboratory" conditions. Since the seventeenth century, the idea of method radically transforms the relationship between knowing and doing. In the words of Michel de Certeau, "the scheme of a discourse is imposed which organizes a way of thinking into a way of doing, into rational management of a production and into a regulated operation over appropriate fields" (CERTEAU, 1996, p. 136). In the case of the field of information as a structure capable of regulating Modernity's regime of truth, the core of the discussion is not reduced to the theory/practice dualism, that is: to an opposition between epistemological "speculation" and concrete "applications", but aims at two different operations, one discursive in nature and the other non-discursive. The hierarchical boundary of speculation and application disappears, to establish the discourse of those practices not yet articulated by discourse.

We observe what happens in the passage from the medieval world to Modernity, through the statements destined to develop in the constitution of the scientific regime of truth: the movement of creation of the scientific statement is outlined, in its bases, around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: thinkers such as Galileo, Newton, Bacon, propose new forms of knowledge of the world, which identify in empiricism its central core, to accomplish which a separation between erudition, magic and experience is necessary.

The word is no longer a gift from the gods and, when written, sacred. The word is disseminated in its printed medium, allowing, with the reduction of material and production costs, greater access to books and an impressive increase in the number and typologies of subjects. The enunciative needs of science implied a disciplinarization of new fields of knowledge (EISENSTEIN, 1998; BURKE, 2003).

The organisation of the information generated in this process itself becomes essential territory for experimentation with new ideas, leading to a reorganisation within the information centres, that is: the libraries of printed materials, the cabinets and museums, and the academies and

research centres, arriving at an order of the universe that establishes the processes of validation of the knowledge previously exposed.

For a long time the history of ideas and science focused on the debates around the conflict between theology and science, causing, as a consequence, the silence about the network of libraries, which concentrates and organizes the results of researches. A black box was closed in which the classification of the natural world, in the 17th century, became natural also in the spaces of the libraries from the 18th century onwards, when the object of the philosophical discussion, of the dispute itself, becomes the new organizing principle from which the Western man builds his apprehension of the world: the scientific reason (FOUCAULT, 1988). It is, therefore, a replacement of cause by effect, a deductive logic that presides over the legitimacy of knowledge. The reorganization of libraries and the constitution of catalogues, repertories and inventories correspond to a way of introducing into language an order of the same type as that established for the living world, to obey the criteria of legitimacy established in this new regime of knowledge.

The closing of this black box placed the field of information in the sphere of the doings, external to the speculative-discursive plane of science. It is not, however, any field, separate from science as another field, because, at the same time that it stands out as a science in itself, it is the organizing field of what all fields of knowledge produced and produce.

This vision of knowledge, which follows a method shared by scientific communities, still survives in many corners of the academy, despite the neoliberal pace and demands. In fact, it is what is in dispute in university reforms all over the world. This baconian spirit in the approach to knowledge can also be found in the collective development work of free software developers (SENNETT, 2009) and, in general, we have this spirit to the extent that we accept to publish our works as Creative Commons in Open Source journals. A certain idea of knowledge, a certain idea of science, a certain regime of truth.

It is worth remembering that Bacon and the world that was shaped by the proposals of science and knowledge in Modernity did not separate, until the end of the 18th century, the exact sciences from the human sciences (FOUCAULT, 1988). For the enthusiasts of the knowledge that was unfolding in the eyes of the West at the beginning of Modernity, there was no distinction/opposition between humanism and observation of the natural world. Perhaps it is in this separation that the change in the regime of truth is slowly taking place, a process of which we see today the results.

Concluding remarks

Modernity's regime of truth, reflected in the exclusive focus of scientific knowledge, contained not only questionable physical assumptions, but a naïve model of that part of society which expressed the hegemonic culture. Moreover, it was implanted as a social prescription, without any interest or negotiation about its validity or acceptability. The completely unreflective imposition of these premises only polarised the issue around the realist distraction regarding the truth value of scientific propositions, and polemics about the supposed irrationality of the popular classes and the corruption of scientists and regulatory institutions. A process of reflective learning would have acknowledged the conditions under which scientific conclusions are grounded, drawn out the social situational issues they entailed, and examined them with the benefit, among others, of the different forms of knowledge held by people other than scientists. This process of reflexive learning would have meant negotiation between different epistemologies and cultural forms, between different discourses; and as such would have entailed the development of social or moral identities of the actors involved (BECK, 1992). The theme of reflexive modernisation corresponds to a process that is found in the conflicts between

contemporary regimes of truth and that deepens the legitimation crisis of modern institutions.

The new regime of truth in which we find ourselves entails the mass abandonment of scientific-instrumental modes of thought, to which modernism confers great power. Reflexive modernisation confronts and attempts to accommodate human difficulty - as seen in the incessant but always open-ended attempt to renegotiate coherent narratives. People are struggling to reconcile conflicting viewpoints fostered in different and overlapping social networks. Their ambivalence towards scientific claims as a source reflects this social situation with multiple inconsistent narratives. Habermas's landmark theses on the public sphere were published over thirty years ago and critical theory had to operate in that heyday of the Keynesian welfare state in terms of fulfilling the project of the Enlightenment, times have changed. Modernisation is replaced with reflexive modernisation. In the 19th century, privileges of position and religious worldviews were being demystified; today the same is happening with the understanding of science and technology, as well as modes of existence in work, leisure and sexuality. The gain in power of techno-economic 'progress', however, is increasingly being overshadowed by the proliferation of truth regimes. At an early stage, these can be legitimised as latent side-effects (BECK, 1992). As they become globalised, they achieve central importance in social and political debates. This "logic" of truth production and distribution is developed in comparison with the "logic" of wealth distribution (which to this day determines social-theoretical thinking). At the centre are the "truths" and the consequences of modernisation, which are revealed as irreversible threats to the life of plants, animals and human beings, of the ecumen.

What knowledge is recognised as such today? And what knowledge is not recognised? What knowledge is on the official agenda? And what is not? To whom does this knowledge belong? Who is recognised as

having knowledge? And who does not have it? Who can teach knowledge? Who can produce the knowledge? Who can realize it? And who cannot?

The protesters against the COVID-19 lockdown in the US, Germany and Brazil, for example, have shown a basic failure to understand what a pandemic is, how a virus spreads, or what the dangers of such a situation actually are. Often appearing from the far right, they are typically incoherent in their reasoning and basic understanding of the issues. There are many forces at work to ensure that as many people as possible are unable to make sense of their political circumstances, and it would be a dangerously elitist and positivist fiction to point the finger at them and say they are simply the stupid.

It is important to consider the role of public literacy, understood as the competence to deal with often fallacious narratives, while recalcitrant in the mould of storytelling. To speak of necessary forms of literacy is inevitably to inject a charge of elitism. But while certain forms of literacy may vary according to proximity to power and prestige, the presence of others transcends these boundaries entirely. Not only can misinformation come so easily 'from the top', but the problem of literacy can and should be approached in a way that is built on an ethic of solidarity rather than elitism, desiring the greatest inclusion for all. Literacy is a collective, social achievement, not something for which individual members of the public can or should be held accountable.

The idea of literacy can usefully function both in the literal sense - the ability to read and write easily - and in the more useful metaphorical sense: a familiarity with accepted analytical systems and mechanisms of how the world works in a way that makes it harder to believe disinformation that is at odds with forms of knowledge capable of offering guarantees on its sources and forms of production. This is the challenge and the commitment that the disciplines that work with the issue of citizens' education need to face and embrace.

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